

**TRAVEL FLORIDA'S**  
*New Seashore Route*  
**AVOID CITY CONGESTION**

# The Buccaneer Trail



*Ride Through History*

*ON*

**FLORIDA AIA**

*and*

**ST. JOHNS RIVER FERRY SERVICE**

*Via Historic and Romantic*

**FERNANDINA** *and*

**ST. AUGUSTINE**

By FRED MILLER

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WHERE once hijackers lurked among hidden coves, and pirates buried stolen treasure, motorists now glide swiftly over a magnificent new highway connecting Fernandina with Mayport. This compact area of northeast Florida coast has known eras of swashbuckling piracy, slave trading, and filibustering. For sheer excitement and violence, the annals of this vicinity have few rivals, and passing travelers are, in reality, making a journey through history.

The new highway, aptly named *The Buccaneer Trail*, is the fulfilment of a dream of long standing by Fernandina civic planners. Operating as a toll facility, it serves as "the gateway to A1A," offering a bypass of Jacksonville to those motorists who desire to use the coastal route.

Although this project had been in the minds of Fernandina civic planners for forty years, action to make the highway a reality can be traced to a meeting that took place on Dec. 13, 1946. After drawing up preliminary plans for the route, financing, and construction of the road, a local committee turned the undertaking over to the Ocean Highway and Port Authority.

The Port Authority secured the necessary financing by sale of revenue bonds. James S. Abrams, Jr., of Allen & Co., New York City, rendered invaluable assistance in the financing phase of the project. 17½ miles of modern highway—including five concrete bridges, one with a draw span—were constructed. Ferry slips were built near the mouth of the St. Johns River, and ferries were secured to provide passage across this large stream of water. The highway and ferry were opened to motorists in the fall of 1950.

With an eye to the road map and the history book, let's make a trial southbound trip over Florida's newest travel artery. To do this we leave U. S. Highway 1, 301 and 23 at Callahan and U. S. Highway 17 at Yulee, turning east on Florida A1A, and driving until we cross over the inland waterway onto Amelia Island.



The Timuquan Indians inhabited this vicinity when Jean Ribault, the French Admiral, dropped anchor in the St. Mary's River, May 3, 1562. Since that time eight flags have flown over the island. Following the French, the Spanish built a mission, and then a fort in the area. Called Isle de Mai by the French, and Santa Maria by the Spanish, the island was renamed Amelia Island by General Oglethorpe in honor of the young sister of George II of England. Spanish settlers fought continually with the English colonists to the north over Amelia Island until Florida was ceded to England by Spain after the French and Indian War.

During the Revolutionary War, wealthy Tories from other Southern States flocked to Florida, which remained loyal to England. There was a mass exodus, however, when notice was received in 1783 that England had returned Florida to Spain by the Treaty of Paris, and Amelia Island served as the point of embarkation.

Thus, Fernandina, on the northern end of Amelia, was a little Spanish town conveniently near the U. S. Border when Jefferson's Embargo Act closed American ports to foreign shipping. American commerce with Europe was increasing rapidly in 1807, and Fernandina, a free port, was soon thronged with ships of all nations. Its



Lighthouse at Fernandina on *The Buccaneer Trail*



wharves were swamped with goods destined to be smuggled into the United States. In 1808 the U. S. forbade further importation of slaves from Africa, and Fernandina, because of its strategic location, also became the base for a lucrative contraband slave trade.

There were many hazards to slave running. Captains caught smuggling slaves were subject to the death penalty, and many human cargoes were jettisoned when slave ships were hard pressed by the U. S. Patrol. Even coming into the desired port of Fernandina, the slavers might fall prey to hijackers who lurked among the marsh islands. Some traders bought immunity from the hijackers. Pierre and Jean Lafitte, the almost legendary pirates, are said to have operated in the vicinity and to have visited Fernandina.



Resentment against the Spanish rule caused a group of "patriots" to organize the Republic of Florida with General John McIntosh as governor. The patriots seized Fernandina and hoisted the "patriots flag"—a white flag bearing a charging soldier with bayonet affixed, and the motto "Salus populi lex suprema" (The well being of the people is the supreme law).

Fernandina had returned to the Spanish rule but briefly when in June, 1817, General Sir Gregor MacGregor, a picturesque young Scotsman, sailed in and demanded the surrender of the town. On hearing of this, old Colonel Morales, in charge of the Spanish garrison, decided to march his troops to St. Augustine and "report to the governor." MacGregor, who had fought under Bolivar in South America, ran up a white flag with a green cross and ruled in great style.

The flag of Mexico succeeded the green cross of Amelia Island. The French pirate, Luis Aury, desiring to make Fernandina a pirate stronghold, and rendezvous for the buccaneers plying their trade in nearby waters, took over Amelia Island. Aury had been appointed first governor of Texas under the new Mexican government, and in this capacity raised the Mexican flag on Oct. 4, 1817, as buccaneers stood at attention.

The buccaneers from Amelia Island ranged the adjacent seas, and at one time there were as many as eight prize ships in port. Slave

ships were special targets for the pirates, and in a two-month period more than a thousand slaves were smuggled into Fernandina. Famous pirate captains visited Fernandina at will. It is said that one lady borrowed a book from a cultured visitor in the town. On reading the book, she noticed the name Lafitte on the flyleaf. When she asked about the name, the lender of the book laughed and said, "Lafitte walks the streets like any other man."

The United States took a dim view of the proceedings at Fernandina and sent troops to the town, taking it from Aury and holding it "in trust" for Spain. Finally the allegiance of the city was removed from dispute when the United States purchased Florida from Spain in 1821.

Under the American flag, a sturdy brick fort in the nineteenth century style was built on the military reservation at the north end of Amelia Island. The project was begun in 1847 and the new fort was named in honor of General Duncan Lamont Clinch, a veteran of the Seminole and Mexican Wars.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Confederate flag was raised over Fernandina as Confederate sympathizers took over Fort Clinch. In 1862, however, Fernandina was overcome by a Union fleet and suffered occupation by the Federal forces.

The city wrote its name in history once more when it became a center of filibustering activities during the Spanish-American War. Recruits and weapons for the Cuban army were smuggled out of Fernandina and when the U. S. entered the conflict over 10,000 troops were encamped in the city.



To visitors in the middle of the twentieth century, historic Fernandina offers the appearance of a quiet, thriving little Southern city. Its harbor, one of the finest natural harbors in the southeast, is home for a prosperous shrimping and menhaden fleet. Two pulp mills—one producing paper, the other raw materials for rayon—add stability to the economy of its 4,600 inhabitants.

To the southbound traffic Fernandina offers the first beach in Florida, with excellent bathing facilities and fourteen miles of beach suitable for automobile traffic. Excellent housing and dining accommodations are available, with sea food featured on most menus.



Draw Span over Nassau Sound, on *The Buccaneer Trail*





Fishing from the Pier (Gus Gerbing's) at Fernandina Beach on *The Buccaneer Trail*

Gus Gerbing, a long time resident, is one of the outstanding authorities in the world on camellias and is the author of a best-selling book on the subject. Mr. Gerbing has another delight for pleasure-seeking visitors in Fernandina—the longest fishing pier in the southeast. This pier, extending some 1,800 feet into the Atlantic, is open the year round and offers excellent fishing for salt water fish of all varieties. Live bait, refreshments, and even stools for the lazy angler, are available to fishermen. Another fine fishing spot is the Fernandina jetties.

Fort Clinch is in the process of being restored, and Fort Clinch State Park is the largest historic site in state ownership. The fort, in excellent condition, is a must for Florida vacationists. A museum is maintained under the supervision of J. William Decker, an able historian, scientist and collector. The eight flags that have flown over the island are on display, as well as other historic documents and articles. The museum also offers exhibitions of Indian relics, firearms, marine life, conchology (sea shells), minerals, fossils, insects, and coins. Mr. Decker, who first came to Fernandina in his youth as a student of natural history, organized the General Clinch Memorial Association, of which the General's grandson, Duncan Lamont Clinch, now serves as president.

Having covered Fernandina, let's drive our automobile east on Atlantic Avenue, turning right as we reach the drive along the ocean front. This highway, part of State Road A1A, moves us south.

About 6 miles from the Fernandina courthouse we pass an azalea garden containing over 300 types of azaleas and japonicas. In the adjoining area of shallow salt water, extensive oyster cultivation once took place.

Leaving Amelia Island, a superbly engineered span carries us over Nassau Sound. Shrimp and fishing boats now ply the waters where the swift barks of buccaneers once sailed. Excellent sport fishing is available in the streams dotting the marshes. A Florida fishing license is not needed for salt water fishing. Trout, red fish, flounder, and whiting are abundant. In deep water areas along *The Buccaneer Trail*, the playful porpoise often entertains passing motorists.

As we travel across Big Talbot Island, we note great stretches of virgin hammock—fertile spots whose soil is composed of leaf mould.

William Bartram, the noted botanist, was much impressed with the "hammocky" soil when he visited the area in the eighteenth century. A variety of trees—oak, magnolia, bay, and gum—grow in the hammocks. Other vegetation along the highway includes palmettoes, sable and palmetto palms, marsh grass, and sea oats. The discerning may find wild orchids and traces of the resurrection fern. On the sand dunes may be seen the "railroad vine," which often extends over a hundred feet long.

Beyond Big Talbot, we come upon Little Talbot Island. You will delight in the long stretches of beautiful Florida beach. This island, of approximately three thousand acres, is being developed by the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials. This new park has access roads down to the beaches with adequate parking facilities for hundreds of automobiles. Also included are shaded picnic areas, concessions selling cold drinks and snacks at reasonable prices. Facilities for



dressing with storage space for clothes and valuables and fresh water showers are also available, thus offering one of the newest, most beautiful bathing beaches on the east coast of Florida.

Researchers claim that more than \$165,000,000 of pirate treasure is hidden in Florida—some in the primitive territory along *The Buccaneer Trail*. An acquaintance told the writer of searching for treasure on Talbot Island armed with a mine detector. One small cache of coins was located, it was claimed and as proof the treasure seeker carried in his possession a "French Louis."

Fort George Island, the next island along our route, is rich in historical lore. Called Alcimani by the Timuquan Indians, it was also named San Juan by the Spaniards. Here Indians murdered Father Martinez, perhaps the first Jesuit Priest to come to America.

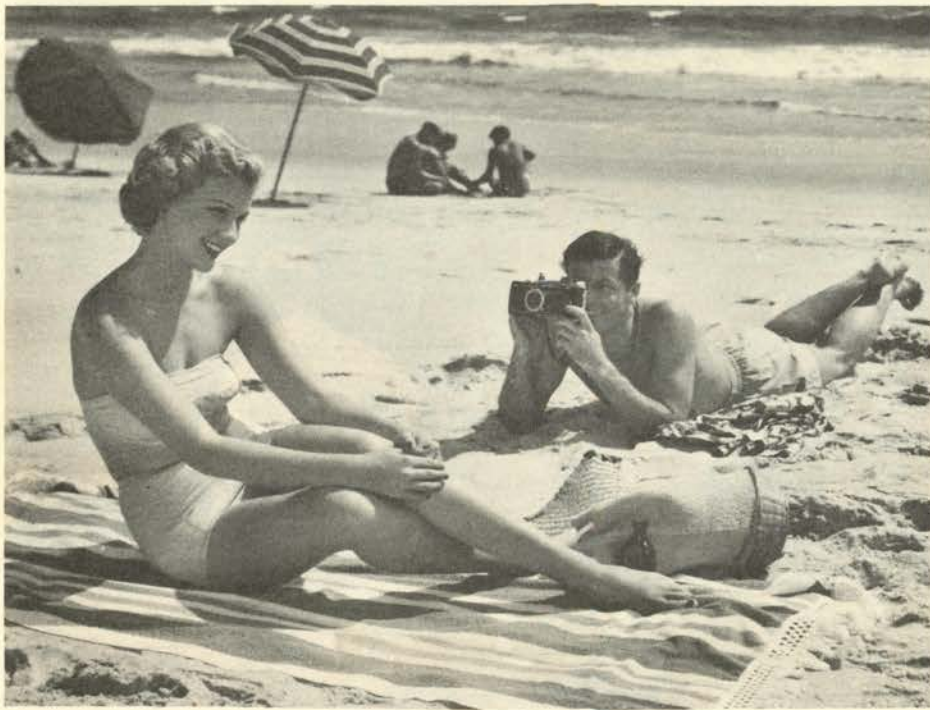
John McIntosh, governor of the Republic of Florida after the rebellion of the "patriots" lived on Ft. George. His "White House" and plantation were sold to Zephaniah Kingsley, a fabulous Scotch planter and slavetrader. Kingsley was the uncle of Mrs. Whistler, made famous in the portrait by her son, James McNeill Whistler.

For himself, Zephaniah built a fine new house, with a lookout on top from whence he could see the new slave shipments coming in through the salt marshes. A walk of tabby rock joined his house with that of his black wife, Anna Madegigine Jai. Kingsley is said

### BURIED TREASURE

If you will write to Ocean Highway and Port Authority, Fernandina, Florida, and enclose one dollar you will receive, carefully rolled in a mailing tube, a beautiful full color, 17x20, illustrated copy, on simulated parchment, of Warner Sanford's "Ye True Chart of Pirate Treasure Lost or Hidden in the Land & Waters of Florida." This is the same exciting treasure map about which articles have appeared in nationally circulated magazines and which is the subject of a color movie travelog recently made.





Florida's finest beaches line *The Buccaneer Trail*

to have married Anna, the daughter of a native chief, in a native ritual in Madagascar. She herself, brought him many slaves in her dowry.

Kingsley's systematical slave trade brought him much of his wealth. Large numbers

latter part of the nineteenth century. The Rollins family established a bird sanctuary on the island. In this vicinity wildlife lovers may find pelicans, sea gulls, sea terns, ducks, egrets, herons, cranes, bitterns, quail, mocking birds, cardinals, blue jays, and many other birds. James Audubon, the great naturalist, visited the vicinity in 1832 to make studies of Florida birds.

On the banks of the St. Johns, just opposite the north ferry slip, stand the homes of Montcalm and Napoleon Broward, heroes of the *Three Friends* of filibustering fame. These two intrepid brothers made many

trips to Cuba with arms and recruits for the Cuban cause during the Spanish-American War on their famous little tugboat, *Three Friends*. Napoleon Broward was later governor of Florida.

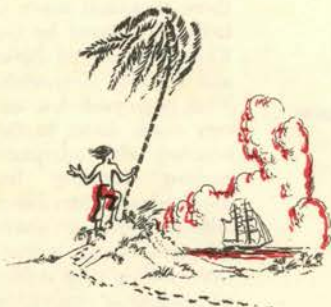
At this point motorists may go into Jacksonville over the Hecksher Drive, or may proceed south by taking the ferry across the St. Johns. The St. Johns is one of the very few rivers in the world that flows north. Ocean-going ships and U. S. Navy vessels frequently steam in and out of the St. Johns. Swarms of sea gulls follow the fishing boats that operate out of Mayport, the little fishing village on the south shore.

The French Huguenots settled in this vicinity in the sixteenth century, and for many years there was almost constant trouble with the Spaniards who settled at St. Augustine. Visible along the highway is a replica of the marker planted in the area by Jean Ribault on May 1st, 1562, when he took possession of Florida for France.

Mayport is also famous for its restaurants. Serving shrimp and fish caught by the town's own fishing fleet, these eating places offer sea food meals that are unsurpassed anywhere.

With *The Buccaneer Trail* behind us, we're still southbound on A1A. If we're ready to call it a day, excellent travel accommodations are available in Jacksonville Beach, or in the quiet plush of Ponte Vedra, where guests will find one of the nicest golf courses in the South. Ahead are St. Augustine, Marineland; Ellinor Village, Daytona Beach and the fabulous resort area of south Florida.

Motorists moving through Florida's ultra-modern cities and resorts can add more pleasure to their trips by looking into the significant history of the territory opened up by *The Buccaneer Trail*



of slaves came to Fort George directly from Africa. There they were acclimated and trained, according to their intellect, some as house servants, others as field hands. Because of their thorough training, "Kingsley niggers" brought good prices in the Southern States.

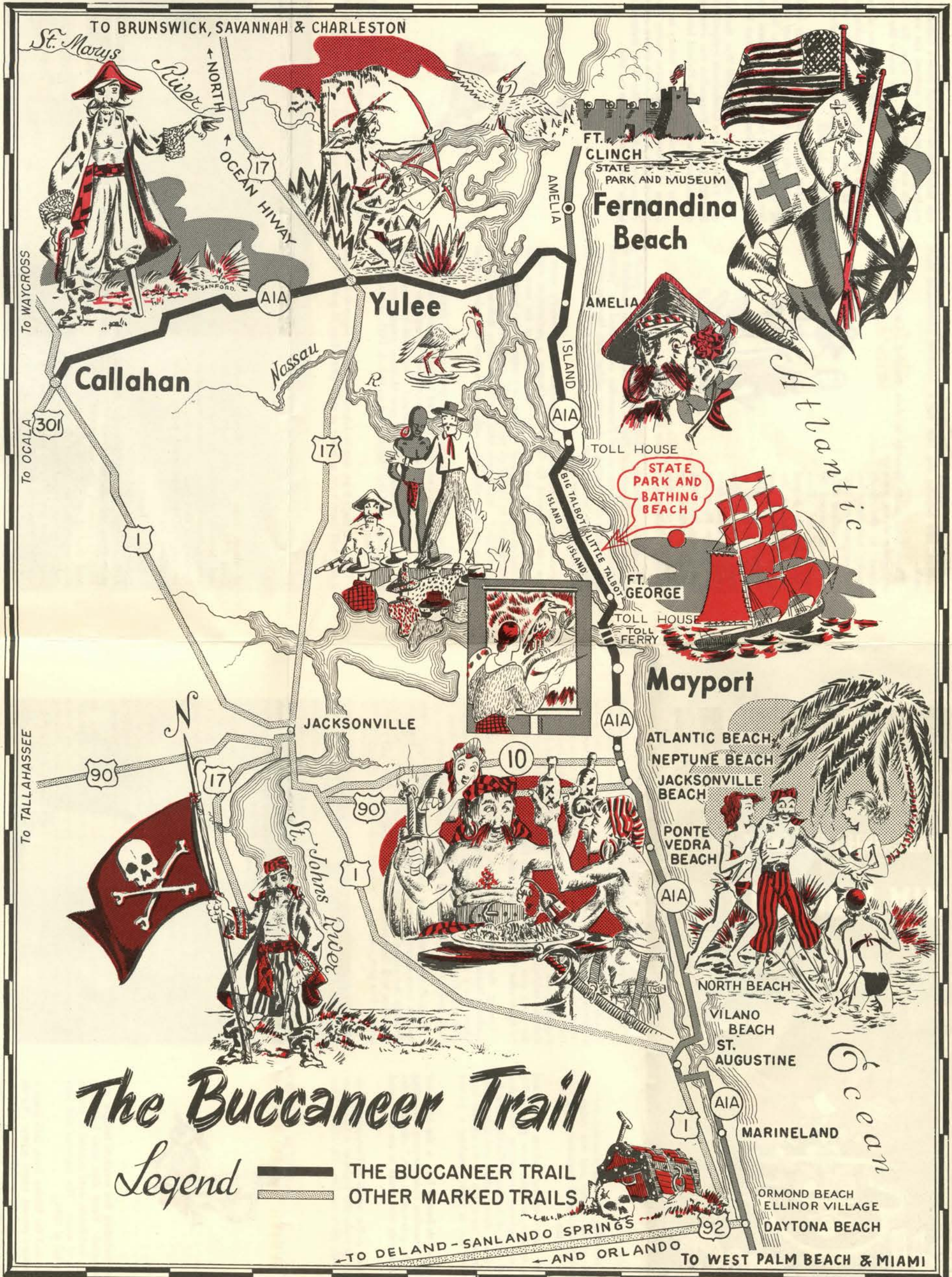
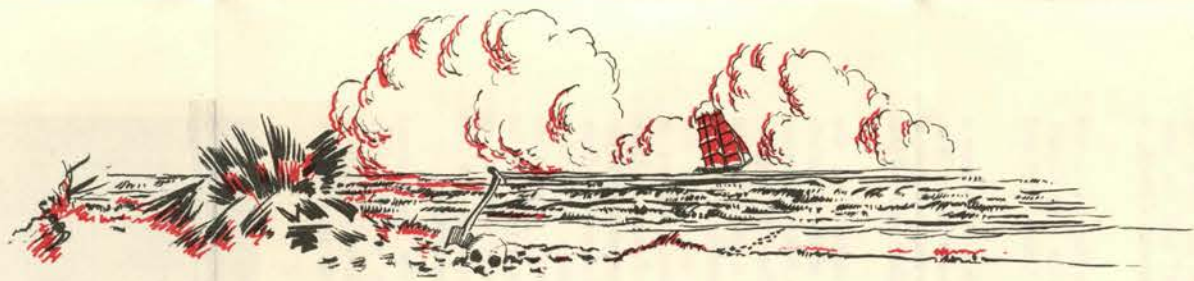
Kingsley's house and that of Anna Madeigine Jai still stand on the property of the Fort George Club. A beautiful row of palm trees, said to have been planted by Kingsley himself, line one stretch of the road leading to the old plantation. Still standing, also, are the walls of the old "tabby houses"—the strange little shell houses that served as slave quarters for Kingsley's black charges.

John F. Rollins, at a later date, bought Fort George Island, and the island experienced something of a tourist "boom" in the



Remains of one of the many tabby houses where slaves lived at the Kingsley Plantation, Fort George Island, on *The Buccaneer Trail*





Passenger car toll charges on *The Buccaneer Trail* consist of 50 cents for car and passengers on the toll road and 50 cents for car and passengers on the St. John's River ferry, plus the 3% federal transportation tax on the ferry—Total Fare \$1.02.

Additional copies of this map folder of *The Buccaneer Trail* are obtainable, without charge, from the Ocean Highway and Port Authority, Fernandina, Florida.